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PROTECTING OUR HEALTH, AIR, AND CLIMATE

Maryland's public health experts explore the health connections between pollen, pollution and climate

For the past year, public health experts at Maryland's Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) have been working on a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to study the effects of climate change on the health of Marylanders and what public health departments can do to lessen the risks. [\[See DHMH's website\]](http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/phpa_navigation/climate_change.aspx)



Maryland's Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene Crystal Upperman and Dr. Clifford Mitchell are developing a strategy to address the public health effects of climate change. Photo credit: Dave Harp.



[\[http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/phpa_navigation/climate_change.aspx\]](http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/phpa_navigation/climate_change.aspx)

The team is led by DHMH's Environmental Health Bureau Director Dr. Clifford Mitchell and Crystal Romeo Upperman, a doctoral candidate in University of Maryland's School of Public Health's Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health and the MEES Graduate program. Although climate change is a global problem, the health impacts are expected to occur at the regional and local levels. One of the most significant threats is to people with asthma and other respiratory diseases that affect our

impacts are expected to occur at the regional and local levels. One of the most significant threats is to people with asthma and other respiratory diseases that affect our ability to breathe. People with asthma are especially sensitive to changes in air quality, including increases in ozone, very small particles, and other air pollutants associated with fossil fuel combustion. A warmer climate means higher levels of these pollutants. In addition, increased temperatures and carbon dioxide can cause flowers to bloom earlier and increase the production of pollen and mold spores, which can trigger allergies and asthma.

As a component of a CDC “Climate-Ready States and Cities” Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/climate_ready.htm) grant, the public health team is working closely with local, state, federal, and non-governmental agencies to assess and prepare for the public health consequences of climate change and its implications for human health.

The strategy has five main objectives: forecast climate impacts and assess vulnerabilities; project disease burden on injuries and temperature related events, respiratory diseases, water- and food-borne illnesses, and vector borne disease; develop and assess public health interventions; develop and implement climate and health adaptation plan; and evaluate the impact of the health adaptation plan.

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